

Ira J. Earl

December 16, 1884- April 28, 1957

Elected 1940 2 years, 1942 4 years

Ira J. Earl was born into a pioneer Southern Nevada family on Dec. 16, 1884, in Bunkerville, the oldest son and third child of Joseph Ira Earl and Elethra Calista Bunker. His grandfather, Sylvester Earl, was a member of the first company of Mormon pioneers led by Brigham Young across the plains to the Salt Lake Valley in 1847. Ira's father, Joseph, was a prominent farmer, church leader and politician. At the age of 21, Earl ventured to the young town of Las Vegas to work for a freighting company. The town had been established by the railroad at an auction in 1905 and was becoming the central point for freight going north and south to the various mines. Earl used his earnings to attend the Brigham Young Academy in Provo, Utah, and later advanced his education at the Utah State Agricultural College in Logan.



Earl returned to Las Vegas in 1913 to take a job for Ed Clark and Charles Ronnow at the Clark County Wholesale Co. In 1916, Earl married Ada Lovisa Leavitt, daughter of Thomas Dudley Leavitt Sr. and Ada Ann Waite, in the St. George LDS Temple. They purchased a small home at 312 S. Sixth St. for \$1,800. At the time, Sixth Street was the last street on the east side Las Vegas.

In 1924, when the first ward of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was organized in Las Vegas, Earl was named its first bishop. Meetings of a small congregation of the church had been held in the Odd Fellows Hall and in a dance hall above Beckley's Clothing Store on Fremont Street. With the organization of a ward, one of Earl's first orders of business was to build a meetinghouse. By 1925, a small frame church had been finished on the northwest corner of Sixth and Carson streets.

During the 1920s, Earl began working at a coal and ice operation, the Home Ice Co. In 1930, he bought out the interests of all the other investors and renamed the business the Las Vegas Coal and Ice Co. His coal and wood yard was located at 412 S. Main St. next to the railroad line. He sold and delivered wood, coal and ice throughout Las Vegas, and kept a good supply of kindling wood on hand, split by his sons, his younger brothers and his nephews. As automobiles became more popular, he opened a Quaker State Motor Oil dealership. Earl was a generous and charitable man. Every year he furnished all the churches in Las Vegas with their yearly supply of heating coal free of charge. He also made sure widows in need had enough coal for cooking and heating. His son Harold remembered that often after a rain, Earl would send him and some of the men to fill trucks with wood chips and drive to the corner of Sixth Street and Bridger Avenue where the sidewalk ended. They spread the chips across the dirt road to make a path through the mud for students at Las Vegas High School.

Hard physical work was a way of life for Earl. In addition to farming and driving wagon teams for the freighting company, he dug irrigation ditches in Bunkerville and worked at the Potosi Mine. It was not unusual for him to unload a railroad car of coal with a helper in one day using hand shovels.

Earl had a lifelong interest in community affairs, instilled by his father. He was a charter member of the Kiwanis Club and was actively involved in the Boy Scout programs. His oldest son, Don, was the first Eagle Scout in Southern Nevada. Earl was named to the Las Vegas School Board in 1931 and served for eight years.

In 1940, Earl, a Democrat, ran for a two-year term on the Clark County Commission. Citing his years of service to the youth of Las Vegas as a school trustee, the Las Vegas Review-Journal endorsed him. He won the race and was re-elected to a four-year seat in 1942. One of his proudest accomplishments, according to his children, was the establishment of Southern Nevada Memorial Hospital, and the acquisition of land adjacent to the hospital for future expansion. In contrast to many elected officials, Earl never put in a claim for reimbursement for his automobile allowance or for expenses he paid personally, to the dismay of his wife after he wore out four sets of tires traveling the poor roads of Southern Nevada on county business. Earl filed for the County Commission again in 1950, but was defeated by Harley E. Harmon in the primary.

Earl eventually divested himself of his various businesses, but later, with his wife, bought the Royal Autel Motel on South Las Vegas Boulevard. He operated the motel until his death on April 29, 1957.

In 1964, the Clark County School District recognized Earl's years of commitment to education and service to Las Vegas by naming an elementary school in his honor.

Marking a major step in the growth of the LDS Church in Southern Nevada, the Las Vegas Temple was dedicated at the foot of Frenchman Mountain on Dec. 16, 1989, the 105th anniversary of Ira Earl's birth